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Healthful foods well worth a try

BY JULIE DEARDORFF
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Step aside, blueberries, spinach and broccoli. It's time to give unsung superfoods a chance.

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Many of us tend to eat what we know and what we can pronounce and prepare. But mixing things up helps add more healthful micronutrients and phytochemicals into our diets, said Mary Russell, director of nutrition services at the University of Chicago Medical Center.

To help steer your cart in a new direction, try incorporating these five healthful foods that you probably aren't eating into your diet:

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Kamut

An ancient relative of durum wheat, kamut increasingly is used as an alternative to regular wheat. It has 20 percent to 40 percent more protein and is higher in lipids, amino acids, vitamins and minerals. Moreover, it can be tolerated by some with sensitivities to regular wheat.

Try it: Kamut usually is found in the bulk section of supermarkets. Substitute it for wheat berries or rice or mix it with sauteed peppers and onions. For breakfast, mix a half-cup with diced apples, raisins, walnuts and a touch of cinnamon and honey.

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Tempeh

Made from fermented soybeans, this traditional Indonesian food looks strange, but it may ease symptoms of menopause because it contains phytochemicals such as isoflavones and saponins, said Russell. The soy protein and isoflavones also might reduce the risk of heart disease and some cancers.

Try it: Slice and saute. Its nutty, mushroom flavor can be used in soups, salads and sandwiches, according to author Jonny Bowden in "The 150 Healthiest Foods on Earth."

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Avocados

Don't shun this creamy fruit because of the fat content. Avocados have good, unsaturated fats, which help with growth and development of the central nervous system and the brain. They're packed with nearly 20 vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients. And they play well with others; when you eat an avocado, it helps the body absorb more fat-soluble nutrients, such as alpha- and beta-carotene.

Try them: Use avocado in place of mayonnaise. Add it to smoothies, salad, salsa, soups or sandwiches.

- Business**
- Local Business
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 - Automotive
 - Columnists

Dried plums (prunes)

These little gems are "a mouthful of rich sweetness," said dietitian and nutrition therapist Victoria Shanta Retelny of Chicago. High in antioxidants, they also have twice as much potassium as bananas.

Try them: Retelny loves to dip them in dark chocolate or she purees them, then tops them with a dollop of plain yogurt and cinnamon.

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Pumpkin

Though fresh pumpkin is available only in the fall and winter, canned products are just as healthful, said dietitian Gloria Tsang, founder of the online nutrition community Healthcastle.com. "A serving of pumpkin (1 cup) has nearly 3 grams of fiber, and is packed with beta carotene, an antioxidant that can help improve immune function and reduce the risk for cancer and heart disease," she said.

Try it: Cut fresh-peeled pumpkin into chunks and roast with a bit of olive oil, salt and pepper, Tsang suggests. Or drop a generous scoop of canned pumpkin into plain pancake batter, or make a soup from canned pumpkin, chicken broth and fat-free half-and-half.

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